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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8303
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 1019
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 1536
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1420
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 0432
RUEWMFC/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000270

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR LLUFTIG
DEPT FOR OCS/ACS/WHA - RBRANSON
DEPT FOR WHA/PD APRUITT, GADAMS, EDETTTER
DEPT FOR PA/PRS
USAID FOR DCHA/OFDA
SAN JOSE FOR USAID/OFDA TIM CALLAGHAN
PLEASE PASS FOR PEACE CORPS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SITUATION UPDATE 1: FLOODING IN SURINAME'S
INTERIOR

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REFTEL: PARAMARIBO 266

11. (U) President Ronald Venetiaan officially declared the regions of Suriname affected by recent heavy flooding (See reftel) as disaster areas in a short evening address to the nation on May 9. The declared disaster zones include areas along the upper Suriname and upper Marowijne rivers. According to current Government of Suriname (GOS)

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estimates, the floods are affecting 37,000 people, of whom an estimated 22,000 have been displaced. The flooding is expected to spread as rains continue to fall, increasing the number of those affected. Loss of life is not yet known, but preliminary damage estimates are in the millions of dollars. The UNDP is currently serving as a liaison between donor groups and the Government of Suriname's crisis management team and has set up daily coordination meetings. Post received late on May 9 a formal request from the GOS for assistance in the disaster. The Embassy has requested emergency assistance funding from USAID-OFDA to address immediate needs septel.

12. (U) Precise conditions of the homeless are not yet certain; some joined neighbors on higher ground, and may be appropriately temporarily sheltered. GOS has identified roughly 500 people for immediate evacuation, but is still identifying relocation site for temporary shelters. Evacuation assessments are still pending for a number of remote communities. The National Coordinating Commission for Disaster Planning (NCCR) estimates that 100 percent of subsistence farms and nearly two thirds of livestock and household goods/equipment have been destroyed in the affected areas. Only two of 18 schools are functioning in the Upper Suriname River area. The extreme difficulty in reaching the remote affected areas, challenging even in normal circumstances, and limited resources to do so has seriously hampered the quick delivery of relief supplies and conduct of rescue missions. Ten of 14 airstrips in the area have been rendered unusable, and of the remaining

four, only one has reasonable logistic proximity to some affected villages. The NCCR has also approached environmental agencies to investigate the risk of mercury and cyanide used in local gold mining activities being spread by flood waters.

13. (U) According to a spokesman from the Alcoa-subsiary Suralco, the current rainfall has caused the water level of the Brokopondo reservoir to rise only 15cm (approx five inches) and would have to rise five meters before they would have to deliberately release more water downstream to ease pressure on the dam. For the moment, Suralco is not overly concerned as not all of the flooded areas drain into the reservoir.

14. (U) The Embassy has reached out to missionaries, environmental NGO's, and local tourist agencies, and uncovered no evidence of unregistered AMCITS affected by the floods. Peace Corps successfully relocated one volunteer on May 8, and seven more are on en route to Paramaribo on May 9.

15. (U) The government has formed a ministerial level Crisis Team led by the Minister of Regional Development Michel Felisi and consisting of the Ministers of Finance, Regional Development, Justice of Police, Defense, and Health. Other members of the team include the head of the NCCR Lt. Colonel Jerry Slijngard, a District Commissioner, and a meteorology center representative. The Red Cross and various other NGO's are organizing themselves by opening up bank accounts and collecting relief supplies to provide assistance as soon as supply chains are finalized. Police and military units have been dispatched to the region, but their numbers are thought to be limited because of transportation difficulties.

16. (U) UN and EU representatives indicated that disaster

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assessment teams from their respective organizations could be on the ground to assist in two to three days. We are inquiring into coordination mechanisms should an OFDA team join them. The Dutch government has pledged a substantial, yet unspecified amount of assistance, while Dutch NGO's and municipalities are collecting donations in the Netherlands. The city of Amsterdam alone has pledged 250,000 Euros. The UNDP has pledged 50,000 USD thus far.

17. (U) Priority areas of need identified by the GOS are food; water; sanitation; emergency housing; transport; telecommunication facilities; skilled personnel in the coordination center; expertise in early recovery, rehabilitation planning, and crisis management; measurement equipment; satellite imaging; and hydrological models. The GOS is suggesting cash contributions be channeled through the NCCR, Red Cross, and UNDP. France and Brazil have indicated a willingness to share satellite weather images.

18. (U) COMMENT: The GOS and donors will face a significant coordination challenge in serving these remote populations in need. The initial GOS situation report bases planning on a medium intensity scenario where rain will drop off, allowing waters to subside within a week, after which recovery measure can be started. Local meteorology reports however, note that we are only at the start of a rainy season normally lasting until mid-July.

LEONARD